

Zaid Ibrahim fumbles his case
Malaysiakini.com
October 21, 2010

COMMENT This column has espoused the view that the contest for the deputy presidency of PKR is a bridge that's being crossed too early and that the current choice is a false one.

All that is academic now that the race is off to a start, and all eyes are focused on the outcome of this unique exercise in direct voting of a political party's principal office-bearers.

But the latest bloviations of Zaid Ibrahim, one of three contestants for the No 2 slot, serve to underscore the contest's presumption more than its factitiousness.

Speaking like he has just emerged from long hibernation, Zaid said in a blog posting that securing justice for Anwar Ibrahim has become the sole struggle of PKR and that it was "unworthy" for it to become a "one-issue party".

Zaid's candidacy for the No 2 post was from the start a protest of Anwar's stultifying control of PKR.

But Zaid is fumbling badly with the arguments around which to configure his opposition to that control.

Anwar's legal problems are emblematic of the Umno-imposed flaws in our polity. Liberation from those flaws must mean emancipation for our politics and society.

That lawyer Zaid misses this salient point is plenty troubling.

Judiciary used to remove political rival

His contention that Anwar has the best legal team and presumably on those grounds is adequately protected recalls a similar observation in the mid-1970s by former Lord President Suffian Hashim who denounced Harun Idris from the bench, saying that the impugned Selangor menteri besar had no reason to fear due process because he had the best lawyer in town.

Arraigned for corruption, the popular Harun, fast emerging as rival for power in Umno, was defended by RR Chelliah, arguably the best trial lawyer in town then.

Suffian was credulous about the motive behind the indictment of Harun, an early instance, albeit more genteel, of the misuse of the judicial process to remove a rival for power in Umno.

Thirteen years later when Salleh Abbas was removed as Lord President, in comparable circumstances of peril to the Umno supremo, the now-retired Suffian's publicly expressed dismay was like the regrets of the owner who bolts the barn after the horses had fled the stable.

Zaid Ibrahim's latest arguments are not calculated to encourage his auditors to be persuaded by the merits of his case that the hand Anwar wields smothers rather than sustains PKR.

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